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FOR THE BENEFIT OF THE LESS DEVELOPED AREAS

SUMMARY

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STATISTICAL SERVICES IN AFRICA

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Director of I.N.S.E.E.,
Head of Service
de Coopération

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STATISTICAL SERVICES IN AFRICA

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The various African States at present occupy different levels of statistical development. One fact seems, however, common to all and that is the almost uniform divergence noticeable between the statistical information required as defined by the services dealing with economic questions or planning, and the data actually available.

2. It seemed useful to draw up a first inventory, by necessity incomplete, of certain steps to be taken in order to speed up statistical development, at different stages in the evolution of a service.

3. These measures must affect various fields which the author has endeavoured to classify in their historical order.

3-1. Legislative or statutory domain

An order should define the functions of the statistical service. This is the first outline of a work programme. It facilitates the relationship between the statistical service and other administrative departments.

3-1-2. This order should define the organisation of the service. However, a number of difficulties arise.

- Concentration or Deconcentration

It seems that, in an initial stage, concentration would be better; there is a shortage of qualified personnel at this stage. If statistical offices are formed, each attached to a Ministry (Health, Information, Industry, Labour) either the qualified staff is dispersed, which will lead to a loss of efficiency, or else the personnel is not qualified, with the risk of sending out numerical information of doubtful accuracy and hence of doubtful value.

- Centralised or decentralised Service

Here again it seems that centralisation is necessary in the first stage. However, as soon as regional schemes have been successfully organised and the government is considering a programme of investigation for the whole country looking several years ahead, the organisation of regional offices can increase the efficiency of the central department.

- Internal Organisation of the Service

The head of the department who is responsible for the policy and the smooth running of the service, should be a qualified statistician. He should be well assisted in the administrative field of the management of the service (finance, personnel, equipment) in order to avoid having his time wasted by a variety of problems unrelated to his work. The number of internal "divisions" can profitably be reduced at the start to avoid the situation where small groups are alternately and successively overworked or idle.

As soon as the service is sufficiently staffed with technicians and executive members, it should be organised to cover four distinct fields of activity.

- Collection of current and periodical statistical information as a result of its own activity or as a byproduct of administrative activity.

- Planning, organisation and carrying out of field investigations in order to obtain structural data that is not available in less developed countries.

- Dovetailing of data obtained into the plan and into the framework of economic accountancy.

- Management and utilisation of the governmental office machine-pool, if such exists.

3-1-3 Secrecy law covering statistical matter in order to facilitate certain inquiries: Family budgets, census of firms, etc.

3-1-4 Coordination and statistical development programme laid down by an interministerial committee which will facilitate the integration of the statistical service into the administrative organisation.

3-2 Staff Problem

3-2-1 Training

- 3 levels must be considered: planning, staffing, executive.
- Specialisation: Work at the department office, field work, use of machines, economic accounting.

3-2-2 Terms of service and Salary of Personnel

- Define terms of service for these three categories of personnel, also a suitable salary in order to retain the trained staff.

3-3 Publications and outside Cooperation

Need to publish and to disseminate the data collected internally and externally with a minimum of delay. Necessary liaison with workers in other countries in order to assure improvement of technical knowledge.

3-4 Inter-state cooperation may be necessary on a regional basis and with the help of outside organisations in order to process the results of surveys which are sometimes too voluminous for the services of one country.

4) Miscellaneous Problems

Establishment of a national programme as soon as possible, adapted to available means and to requirements. Establishment of an order to priority of requirements.

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